

Duxbury Clipper

Wednesday, January 23, 2002

Historical Commission Urged to Preserve 'The Ridge'

By PAULA MAXWELL

Several residents attending last week's Historical Commission hearing urged the new owners of a Victorian cottage in an historic area of Standish Shore to reconsider total demolition of the structure.

The property is one of several cottages, which make up the area known as, "The Ridge," built in the late 19th century after the Old Colony Railroad linked the town and Boston, and summer visitors began flocking to the town.

The cottage is located at 30 Ocean Avenue on the estate of the late Doris Beal. The new owners have filed a demolition

application with the town's inspectional services department and say they intend to construct a 3,500 square foot home on the site. They own four adjacent parcels of land in the area of cottages built between 1870 and 1900.

Several people attending the hearing said that the cottage community's historic landscape overlooking the water would be forever changed if the owners do not try to incorporate preservation of some of the unique Victorian architectural features in their plans. Some of the original cottages would be dwarfed by the proposed new home, they said.

James Bicknell and Suzanne Morse, the new owners of 30 Ocean Avenue, appeared before the historical commission and explained their plans to the board. Bicknell, a 20-year resident of the town, explained that he currently rents property at nearby 16 Ocean Avenue. He told members he wants to build a home that would be suitable in size.

"The current residence doesn't come close to meeting the needs of a family of four," he said. He said he had consulted a builder about renovating the structure but he learned that the

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cost of restoring it would be prohibitive. He said he was told that "starting from scratch" would be the best way to go.

Historical Commission member Susanna Sheehan suggested that the new design proposed would not be compatible with a lot of the existing houses and asked him why he wanted to change the structure entirely.

Bicknell said that several of the houses on the Ridge have been modified over the years but that doing so would not lend itself to the space needs of a family of four.

He said his building plans called for a shingled Cape style home which would be compatible with the "tone" of the neighborhood and not something out of character in overall appearance. He said both owners respected the historical nature of the property.

Historical Commission Co-Chairman Martha Himes noted that an inventory done by a consultant for the Commission indicated that the area known as "the Ridge" could possibly be considered for the National Register of Historic Places.

She quoted the inventory's architectural description on the structure at 30 Ocean Avenue pointing to many of the unique Victorian features including a gabled roof and porches.



Historical Commission members Martha Himes and Susanna Sheehan review the demolition delay bylaw.

Also submitted to the Commission's record was a letter from the Preservation Consultant Karen Davis of Cambridge, which was read aloud. It expresses concern about the potential demolition of the house at 30 Ocean Avenue in an area she referred to as, "the most picturesque enclave in Duxbury."

"Having researched many properties throughout Duxbury for the ongoing Historic Resources Survey, it is my opinion that there is no other area or street in Duxbury where the demolition of one house would have such a devastating impact on its neighbors," the letter read.

"The Ridge is a rare ensemble of summer cottages built in the late 19th century as part of Duxbury's first summer colony. The six cottages

fronting on Ocean Avenue have stood together on an unpaved road looking much as they do now for 100 years. They are among a handful of cottages remaining in the original 52 acre Standish Shore subdivision and they are the only cottages that have not been visually impacted by the late 20th century development.

In Duxbury, the demolition of homes 75 years or older is subject to the Demolition Regulation bylaw. Administered by the Historical Commission, the bylaw provides that if a homeowner wants to

demolish his or her old house or a significant portion of it, then he or she must go through the demolition application process. The Commission determined that 30 Ocean Avenue fell within the confines of the bylaw and called the public hearing. The Commission will render a decision after the hearing on the permit and notify the applicant in writing stating its reasons with a copy to the Director of Inspectional Services and the Planning Director.

If the Commission determines that the building or structure is historically significant, meeting one of the three criteria of a "regulated building or structure", then the Director of Inspectional Services cannot issue a demolition permit for a period of six months from the date of notification unless the Commission informs the Director of Inspectional Services otherwise. During that time, the Commission can work with the homeowner to find ways to preserve the structure, but the delay does not legally bind the owner to change his ultimate plans.

Tony Kelso of Elder Brewster Road also spoke at the hearing and told of his family's own experience with two similar kinds of cottages, one of which was taken down. "For 50 years we've regretted taking down our summer cottage we couldn't replace... It's these summer cottages that make Standish Shore..." He urged the owners "to try and make it work". He said that in places like Watch Hill (RI) or the San Francisco Bay area, houses like these would be treasured and protected from demolition.

"I hope the applicant will take time to retrench and look again. It doesn't always take a ton of money. My hope is that six months will give the applicant time to see what could be

done and what is there that can be preserved," he said.

Resident Deborah Katz of Mayflower Lane read aloud a letter she submitted to the board in which she refers to "these summer cottages as Duxbury's 'little piece of Martha's Vineyard' for they are similar to the many Victorian cottages of that island which have been recognized for their historic importance and preserved ... It is my personal hope the current homeowners will learn more about the history of the Ridge and their new home and recognize the importance of preserving ..."

Also speaking to the six member Commission was resident Susan Maycock of Samoset Road, an architectural historian, who spoke of the unique character of the six remaining houses, which she called "surprisingly in tact." She cited some of the common features noting they all had gables, porches and double doors ... very small cottages on very small lots". She told the commission that her grandparents rented one of the cottages there for their honeymoon in 1906.

"I challenge you to go and find any place else in Duxbury that has the feeling and conveys this sense ..." She told commission members it held architectural and cultural importance of Duxbury.

"To remove a piece of it is more a substantial loss than just a single house. It's an excellent example of what the Demolition Delay Order is supposed to do - to look at what loss a building will do to the historic fabric here, and the loss would be substantial. It will change the scale, orientation and feeling ...

The Commission could issue a decision by its next meeting in February.